

Thomas Jefferson to Gouverneur Morris, March 12, 1793, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO THE U. S. MINISTER TO FRANCE¹ J. MSS. (GOUVERNEUR MORRIS)

¹ See Ford's *Writings of Washington*, XII., 269, for Washington's comments on this letter.

Philadelphia, Mar. 12, 1793.

Dear Sir, —Your Nos. 8. to 13. inclusive have been duly received. I am sensible that your situation must have been difficult during the transition from the late form of government to the reestablishment of some other legitimate authority, & that you may have been at a loss to determine with whom business might be done. Nevertheless when principles are well understood, their application is less embarrassing. We surely cannot deny to any nation that right whereon our own government is founded, that every one may govern itself according to whatever form it pleases, & change these forms at it's own will; & that it may transact its business with foreign nations through whatever organ it thinks proper, whether king, convention, assembly, committee, president or anything else it may chuse. The will of the nation is the only thing essential to be regarded. On the dissolution of the late constitution in France, by removing so integral a part of it as the king, the National assembly, to whom a part only of the public authority had been delegated, appear to have considered themselves as incompetent to transact the affairs of the nation legitimately. They invited their fellow citizens therefore to appoint a national convention. In conformity with this their idea of the defective state of the national authority, you were desired

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from hence to suspend further payments of our debt to France till new orders, with an assurance however to the acting power that the

suspension should not be continued a moment longer than should be necessary for us to see the reestablishment of some person or body of persons authorized to receive payment & give us a good acquittal; (if you should find it necessary to give any assurance or explanation at all.) In the mean time we went on paying up the four millions of livres which had been destined by the last constituted authorities to the relief of St. Domingo. Before this was compleated we received information that a National assembly had met, with full powers to transact the affairs of the nation, and soon afterwards the Minister of France here presented an application for three millions of livres to be laid out in provisions to be sent to France. Urged by the strongest attachments to that country, and thinking it even providential that monies lent to us in distress could be repaid under like circumstances, we had no hesitation to comply with the application, and arrangements are accordingly taken for furnishing this sum at epochs accommodated to the demand and our means of paying it. We suppose this will rather overpay the instalments & interest due on the loans of 18.6. and 10. millions to the end of 1792. and we shall certainly use our utmost endeavors to make punctual payments of the instalments & interest hereafter becoming exigible, and to omit no opportunity of convincing that nation how cordially we wish to serve them. Mutual good offices, mutual affection & similar principles of government seem to destine the two nations for the most intimate communion; and I cannot too much press it on you to improve

every opportunity which may occur in the changeable scenes which are passing, and to seize them as they occur, for placing our commerce with that nation & it's dependencies, on the freest & most encouraging footing possibly.

Besides what we have furnished publicly for the relief of St. Domingo, individual merchants of the U. S. have carried considerable supplies thither, which have been sometimes purchased, sometimes taken by force, & bills given by the administration of the colony on

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the minister here, which have been protested for want of funds. We have no doubt that justice will be done to these our citizens & that without a delay which would be ruinous to them. We wish authority to be given to the minister of France here to pay the just demands of our citizens out of the monies he may receive from us.

During the fluctuating state of the *Assignats* of France, I must ask the favor of you to inform me in every letter of the rate of exchange between them & coin, this being necessary for the regulation of our custom houses.

Congress closed it's session on the 2d instant. You will see their acts in the newspapers forwarded to you, and the body of them shall be sent as soon as the 8vo. edition is printed. We are to hold a treaty with the Western Indians in the ensuing month of May, but not under very hopeful auspices.

You will perceive by the newspapers a remarkable fall in the price of our public paper. This is owing chiefly to the extraordinary demand for the produce of our country, and a temporary scarcity of cash to purchase it. The merchants holding public paper are obliged to part with it at any price to raise money.

I sent you by the way of London a dozen plans of the city of Washington in the Federal territory, hoping you would have them displayed to public view where they would be most seen by those descriptions of men worthy & likely to be attracted to it. Paris, Lyons, Rouen, & the sea port towns of Havre, Nantes, Bordeaux & Marseilles would be proper places to send some of them to. I trust to Mr. Taylor to forward you the newspapers by every direct occasion to France. These are rare at all times & especially in the winter; and to send them thro' England would cost too much in postage. To these circumstances as well, probably as to some miscarriages, you must ascribe the length of interval sometimes experienced in the receipt of your papers.—